

I've Got a Secret

The purpose of this exercise is to strengthen your awareness of how meaningful it is to act in accord with your authentic values in contrast to acting in the service of getting social approval or an ego boost.

Pick an action that manifests a deeply held value, and see if you can plan a way to do that in total secrecy. For example, do a favor for a friend without disclosing you're the one who has done it; make a large contribution to a charity you love without telling anyone you know that you did so; or show compassion for a stranger in need but anonymously.

At some point that same day, do ten minutes of values-writing about what that experience was like for you and what it suggests about how you might build more values-based actions into your day to day life. Make sure not to talk to others about what you've learned from this exercise. This is about you doing things you care about doing only because you care.

If this exercise is hard, that is important to reflect on. You may find yourself letting your plan leak out to a friend, or telling her about your good deed later. Dig into why. If that dig in is emotionally upsetting to you, suspect that the need for social approval may be overshadowing your capacity to find your own sense of meaning. In that case, do a very small version of this exercise almost every day until it is easy and you can maintain your secrecy about your actions 100%. Then you can gradually increase the importance of the actions you take.